

Don't Ask Me, I Can't Tell You by Junigatsu84

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Summary: It's difficult maintaining a normal relationship when you've been lost, possessed, and nearly killed by creatures most people don't believe exist. What's worse is having a crushing on your best friend, and accidentally kissing him. WillxMike, MikexEleven Bromance, Friendship Fic with Fluff mixed in.

1. Chapter 1

Chapter One Girlfriend Gone

Will waited anxiously by her locker. He and Angelina had been going out for about a year, since the Snow Ball. It took everything in him not to pace in front of it. That would definitely look bad and then she'd know and she'd probably start crying.

He sighed, leaning his head on the locker. He could see out the corner of his eye Max and Lucas. They balanced it so naturally, being friends and being in love. Although, it helped that Max knew pretty much everything: the Upside-Down, Demogorgons, the Shadow Monster, and, of course, Will being possessed by it.

How do you explain any of that to your 100% normal girlfriend? How do you explain that you're a 15 year old with PTSD? Only so much of it could even be explained under the cover of getting lost in the woods. It wasn't for lack of trying on her behalf, really, she stuck around longer than he expected her to. She was nice to him. She was his first kiss, his first girlfriend, and yet, here he was about to break up with her.

She pranced up to him before he could prepare himself. "Will!" She threw her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek. All the words he had rehearsed were vanishing from his mind, like a script shredding.

"So, I was thinking about going to the movies this Friday. A Chorus Line is coming out and I heard that we might be doing it for next year's play, so long as some of the content gets cut. What do you think?"

Will stared and couldn't find the words. His mind shouted, "*Say something. ANYTHING!*"

"A-Angelina, can we talk?" Will watched her smile fall. He felt like he was going to be sick. She didn't deserve this. "I-I, umm, you've been the most amazing girlfriend. B-but..." he drew a shaky breath and blurted, "I can't keep doing this. I'm not boyfriend material. I'm no

where close to normal and I can't keep pretending I am when I'm not. I'm so sorry."

There were the tears. She said with a shaky voice, "Will, I'm here for you. I don't want you to be normal. I like that you're different."

It came out wrong. He didn't want her to pity him. He just wanted her to know that it wasn't because of her.

"I am here for you." She opened her arms to hug him but he backed away and blurted, "I don't love you."

He thought she looked heartbroken before but no, this was heartbreak and it looked like he had just stabbed her in the chest. He ran down the hall and shoved the doors open as the bell rang. She could go home and cry, he could go home and puke. He hated himself for hurting her, but there was a relief for not having to fake it anymore. And he hated himself worse for that.

He waited at the carport for his mom to pick him up. Will hoped his mom would get here before the group did. They always hung out with Will until his mom came but today he couldn't face them. He hadn't told them about what he had been planning for the past few weeks. How could he? Both Lucas and Mike were happily in relationships and they liked Angelina... well.... kind of. Max and Eleven had trouble keeping up with her fast talking and they had no interest in most of what she had to say. They weren't big into the theater or into the social drama that came with play productions. And Dustin would be pissed. He never had a girlfriend and so Will dumping her for absolutely no reason would be grounds for glowering stares for at least the next few weeks, if not forever.

"Come on, mom. Come on," he thought. But, too late, there they were. Eleven and Mike holding hands. How could she do normal so well? How could she hide everything? She had only come back this school year, but she had already seemed to adapt to normalcy. It fit her like a glove, so long as certain people stayed away from Mike, of course. The bullies didn't recognize her, not with the fake glasses and full head of hair.

"Will!" Dustin called. "Where did you go, man? You were supposed to

meet us up at the lockers." The group all walked over to him and assumed their spots at the bike rack.

"I.. uhh.. my mom was supposed to pick me up early."

Mike furrowed his eyebrows. He could tell. Why was it he could always tell? "Hey, Will? You ok?" "Y-yeah. Of course."

Eleven was staring. She definitely knew. *"Don't say anything, Eleven. Don't say anything."*

Will still wasn't sure if she could read his thoughts or not. But apparently not. "Friends don't lie."

"I broke up with Angelina." It just fell out his mouth.

"Wait, what?!" "Why?" "What happened?" They're questions flurried around them. He had nothing. He was exhausted.

He mumbled, "I don't love her. It isn't like what you guys have it's nothing like it at all." He couldn't look at them, especially not Dustin. Mike put his hand on Will's shoulder. There was the pity again. When would he be okay? When would people stop putting him? He saw his mom's car rounding the corner and he ran to meet up with it.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter Two Much to Say

Will laid on top of his brother's car, staring at the sky. The sun was setting so he still felt safe, somewhat anyway. It had been light outside when the Shadow Monster had gotten him. But he pushed those thoughts away.

Will heard the sound of a bike and sat up. Mike's pedaled up the driveway, his long legs made his bike seem too small for him now. He'd probably get a new one for Christmas.

Mike screeched his brakes. "You didn't respond on the walkie."

"Just because I don't respond, doesn't mean I'm in mortal danger."

"No, but it is excuse enough to come over to check."

Will smirked. Mike dropped his bike and hopped up on the car.

"What happened between you and Angelina?"

Will sighed, and clutched his knees to his chest. "I couldn't do it anymore, Mike. I couldn't keep pretending to be normal."

Mike nodded, "But she was really nice."

"I know. And that's what sucks. She stuck around, even when I hyperventilate, or have flashbacks, or seem completely paranoid. She stuck around even though I can't go anywhere without an escort from my mom. She stuck around without a clue of what I really am."

"What-"

"Broken. I am broken, Mike. Fundamentally. I don't know if I can ever do normal."

"Will, one relationship ending doesn't mean you'll never find someone."

"Sure, I mean, I may someday find someone I love and care about deeply. We'll get married and then I'll tell her the big secret of how I was trapped in another dimension and nearly died twice from monsters that are either invisible or faceless. And then she can take me to a mental hospital and visit me on weekends. How nice."

"Then, we'll explain it. All of us. She couldn't possibly think we're all insane."

"But it isn't just that." Will sighed and laid down. "I never felt it."

Mike laid down too, "Felt what?"

They're hands almost touched. *Zap!* "The electricity." Will could hear his heart pound in his ears. He swallowed hard and told his heart to slow down.

"You let Dustin go on about that. What you and Angelina had was-"

"It was missing everything. It was all the stuff that you're supposed to enjoy. We held hands, we kissed, went on dates. But I never felt anything like what I can see you and Eleven have."

Mike turned to look at Will. "*Keep looking at the sky. Don't look,*" he thought.

Mike sighed, "Maybe you just need some more time. You went through a lot last year. Don't be so hard on yourself."

"We'll go crazy together..." Only you're not going crazy now, are you Mike? You're happy and normal and I'm the only crazy one again."

Will sat up and got off the car. It was starting to get dark. "You're probably right. Everything will be fine. I just need to keep healing. Someday, I won't be a Zombie boy. Someday people will stop pitying me and looking at me like I'm going to break or fall apart at any second."

"Will-" Mike got off the car.

Will started walking towards the house, his voice getting louder without meaning to. "And maybe someday I'll feel comfortable living

a normal life. And I won't worry about things coming after me or worry that they're still inside of me. But until then, Will Byers, the missing, the zombie boy, the fairy will just have to settle for being the town freak!"

He ran inside, running to his room and slamming the door. He leaned against wall beside the door. He had actually said "the fairy". That part wasn't supposed to come out. He couldn't keep his words inside his head today. He just needed this day to end. He heard footsteps coming down the hallway. He put his head in his hands, he was not in the mood to answer his mom's concerned questions or hear the pity in her voice. But the voice he heard instead was Mike's.

"Will!" He banged on the door.

Panic filled his chest. *"Why hadn't he left?"*

He heard his mom outside the door. "Mike, what's going on?"

"Will and I had a fight. I just need to talk to him. Can you give us a few minutes, please, Mrs. Byers?"

"If he doesn't want to talk, honey..."

"I'll just be a minute, I promise. I don't want to leave it like this."

Will felt the tears welling up. Mike had meant that he didn't want those words to be the last conversation he ever had with Will. There was always an assumption that any day could be Will's last. It had been a year since the last, two years since the first. And it was always there beneath every fight. People tended to make up quickly with Will, lest he die the next day.

She hesitated. "Five minutes. Then, Jonathan can take you home. It's dark out."

"Thank you, Mrs. Byers." Mike slumped down next to Will's door. "Will, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it like that."

Will voice trembled, "I know you didn't."

"You're not any of those things people call you. You're a badass."

"Oh yeah, sure. I thought friends didn't lie."

"Are you kidding? You're totally a badass. You survived evil demons from another dimension TWICE. If anybody knew that they would keep their mouth shut."

Will chuckled.

"You're the bravest person I know. Someone is going to see that, and they'll love you for it. It's going to happen."

There was the electricity again. He felt it in his fingertips. He felt like he was going to jump out of his skin. He turned up the sarcasm to compensate, "And you're so certain-"

"I am! Because after all the shit you've been through, you deserve the love you're looking for-"

He had moved before he could think to stop himself. He pulled the door open to see Mike's startled face. He leaned in and kissed him. *Zap!* Lightning and soft lips.

Will's brain had finally caught up to his body. He pulled himself away and saw Mike's face wrenched in surprise and disgust.

"What have I done?"

He slammed the door and locked it. "GO AWAY, MIKE! GO AWAY!"

Will threw himself onto the bed. He pressed the pillow against his head. He wanted to scream! He wanted to stop breathing. He wanted to make it all go away and erase those 5 seconds. Mike's expression was impressed on his eyes. He pressed the pillow tighter, he wanted to stop breathing but all he could do was sob. He'd lost everything now.

3. Chapter 3 (FLUFFY detour)

Chapter Three to Express Yourself

(The writer would like to inform you that the following chapter is a fake. It is among the most fanny of fanservice for a fanfiction. There is no doubt in her mind that the following chapter would ever happen. But she felt the need to write it. Were these two boys from a different time or circumstances, the following could very well be possible. But alas, we love Stranger Things because it is in the 80s. But that time was not very kind to gay people. Accept this as a fluffy triumph of love and creative writing. There will be another chapter to follow that is what actually happens. Now let the fandom commence.)

Mike banged on the door. "Will! Please, Will! Open the door!"

Joyce Byers came up to him. "Honey, I think it's time for you to go."

"Mrs. Byers, please."

"Fights are normal things, honey. You aren't always going to leave on a good note. Just give him a bit of space."

Mike shook his head and ran out the door. He ran out to Will's window and tried to open it. It was stuck.

Will bolted out of bed to try and lock it, but Mike was already shimmying it open.

"Will! Please!" There was a desperation in his voice.

"He thinks I'm going to kill myself, doesn't he?" Not that he would. After everything his mom, brother, and friends did to keep him alive, he would rather live in this fear and agony for the rest of his life than cause them another ounce of pain. He didn't have the strength to fight Will on the window, besides, he thought, it would probably break.

Mike forced the window up and climbed in. Will stepped back, his hands covering his eyes as he sat on the bed. "Please forget that I ever

4. Actual Chapter 3

(Actual) Chapter Three Coming to Terms

Mike sat on the carpet, frozen. Will Byers, his best friend since Kindergarten, had just kissed him. How long had Will liked him like this? What was he supposed to do?

Joyce Byers came up to him. "Honey, I think it's time for you to go."

Will stared at the door and stood up.

"Fights are normal things, honey. You aren't always going to leave on a good note. Just give him a bit of space."

She had no idea what had just happened. How long would Will keep this a secret? How long had he been keeping it a secret?

Mike had tried to convince Joyce that he was fine biking on his own but she wouldn't have it. So Jonathan loaded Mike's bike in the trunk and hopped in the car. Mike looked back at Will's window. He leaned in the car and told Jonathan, "I'll be just a minute." He grabbed his walkie and walked away from the car.

He held the walkie close. What was he supposed to say? *"Something is better than nothing."*

Will wanted to scream til his lungs gave out, but he only allowed himself to quietly sob. He just wanted to curl in a ball and die.

"Why? What the hell was I thinking? No. Bottom line, I wasn't thinking. And now I've ruined everything. I may not have had a normal life, but Mike and the others were my rock. And now I'm falling."

"Will..." The walkie crackled and he gasped. He stared at the walkie, wanting to both throw it and cradle it.

"Will... I'm still here, okay?"

Will grabbed the walkie and held it tight.

The crackling continued, "I don't know what-" His voice trailed off. He spoke again "I-I'm still here for you, Will. Do you copy?"

Will's hands shook.

"Will, please, do you copy?"

He steadied his breath the best he could and held the button. "I copy."

"Okay...I'll see you tomorrow...Over and out."

Will curled up under the covers, still clutching the walkie. He could breathe again. He dreaded tomorrow but it couldn't get there soon enough.

5. Chapter 4

Jonathan drove steadily down the road, it was deer season and one of his high beams was out. So the drive was taking much longer than Mike liked.

"Is everything okay between you two?"

Mike drew a breath, "We'll be fine." He said it like it was a fact. He hoped it was.

There was an awkward silence that Jonathan usually kept around him. The air felt tense like there was something he wanted to say.

"Just-" Jonathan gripped the steering wheel tight. "Nevermind."

As much as he didn't want to talk, he found himself asking, "What?"

Jonathan sighed. "I know you don't want to hear this but- don't take what you guys have for granted."

"I don't!"

"You just did. You said, 'We'll be fine.' I made the mistake of thinking that too once. Do you remember Alison Lydell?"

"Alison?"

"Yeah, she was my best friend growing up, my only friend. You don't ever remember seeing her?"

"Kind of."

"Well, she and I were close. But when 8th grade came around, she wanted to hang out with her other girlfriends more. At the same time, I started to get a crush on her. I know now that the two weren't necessarily related but, at the time, I thought they were. And I just started being irritable around her. Everytime she hung out with her other friends, I resented her for it. I complained about it, and I pushed her away."

Mike started to panic. Did Jonathan know about Will? He wanted to ask but he couldn't risk outing Will to his brother if he was wrong. This was Will's secret. So he probed, "But she was a girl..."

Jonathan shook his head, "My point is... friendships need maintenance and communication. I should have told her that I liked her."

"Why would you do that? Did you think she liked you back?"

"No. I knew she didn't. But if I told her, maybe we could have moved passed it. I don't know. But whatever is going on with you and Will. You have to talk about it. He's normally been the kind of person to open up about stuff. He's normally good at expressing stuff. I'm just floored that he yelled at you like that. What happened between you two?"

"It's not my business to say. You can ask him but I won't tell."

"Okay. Okay. Just, just keep trying okay? You both have been through a lot, and he's going to need you, all of you."

Mike nodded, "I will."

Jonathan pulled up to Mike's house. He cut the engine and got out. Mike turned to him, "What are you doing?"

"It's my girlfriend's house. You think I'm just going to drop you off and not stop in?"

"Oh, right."

Mike grabbed the bike out of the back and wheeled it into the garage as Jonathan went to the front door. He could hear the cadence in his mom's voice, "Are you staying over for dinner?"

Mike was hungry but did not feel like sitting down at the table. He didn't want to fake a conversation like everything was okay. He wanted to unpack everything. He wanted to think. He wanted to talk to Eleven. He froze. He ran to the door, opened it, and called out, "Mom! I'm going to Jane's house to do homework!"

Before she could answer, he ran to get his bike, and made his way over to Hopper's.

Will's eyes stung from crying. He knew that he should put something cold on them before they swelled up more. Everyone would see. He could chalk it up to the break up, but would that really make sense? He broke up with her. Was he allowed to cry because of that?

A soft knock came on the door. What was he supposed to tell her? Sometimes she really did make an effort to treat him like a normal kid but most times it was just very poorly masked pity and worry. He didn't want to show his face, because then she'd see and he'd hear it. "Oh sweetie..." But there was an itching. He used to do it as a kid. He would find a small space, sometimes under the bed, sometimes in a closet, or under a cabinet and he would cry. He would be in the dark both wanting to be alone and wanting to be found. But he'd have to unlock the door first.

He threw the blankets off and opened the door.

"Oh, sweetie..."

Will sighed. She hugged him immediately.

"What happened, baby?"

"I broke up with Angelina." *And I kissed Mike.* His stomach churned. The words still felt so close, he had to swallow them back down.

She rubbed his back, "I'm sorry, honey. Breaking up is never easy. It's good that you did though."

Will looked up, confused. "What?"

"I've been there before, honey. You always seemed a little, well, unsure around her. Like you were nervous but not in the 'in love' kind of way. I had that with a boy named Tristan when I was... well... younger than you." She let go of him and sat on the bed. Will followed.

"What happened?"

"We were in fourth grade or maybe it was fifth. Anyway, he was the first boy who asked if he could be my boyfriend. I wanted that. I was stringy and gangly and I hadn't hit puberty yet."

Will wrinkled his nose. It was among those words you don't like hearing come from your parents. Almost as bad as when teachers said them.

"None of the boys ever gave me a second glance. I was head over heels for this boy named Jesse. He played soccer and I'd chase after him on the playground. But I never thought he would ask me out, so I said yes to poor Tristan. We were together for about 4 months before I kissed Jesse during recess. I was a kid, but it wasn't right. I shouldn't have said yes to him in the first place. But I definitely should have broke up with him first. You breaking up with Angelina was healthy and mature. Much more than I was." She ran her fingers through his hair. "When you find someone you really love, you won't have to break someone else's heart to do it."

"But what if that never happens? What if the people love don't ever love me back?" Will thought.

"Mom... I don't know if I'll ever feel that way about someone who could love me back." He had to catch himself, "N-not really. How could anyone love me when I'm... I'm so messed up." There came the tears again.

"You're not messed up, sweetie."

"I still have flashbacks. Sometimes I think I see things out the corner of my eye and I jump but it turns out it's nothing. I still have nightmares. Who would want me?" *Stop talking, Will.*

"You had to fight for your life. Hopper has friends from the war who are going through exactly what you are and they have wives, children, and lives. They find a way to move on, to deal with episodes when they come, and to find their own sense of normal."

"But I'm not them."

She got a stern look on her face. "One night, Hopper got a call from

his friend's wife. She said he wasn't in the house and that his car was in the driveway. He had been missing for four hours. When they found him, he was in the woods in his army gear. He said that they were coming for him. He was left behind to defend the battalion and that he had to sacrifice himself to keep them alive. Hopper had to talk him down, bring him back." She held onto Will's shoulder. "I'm not saying this to scare you. I'm saying this because I want you to know that you are not alone. That same friend was at Hopper's barbeque with past July. He is okay because he has people to love him, support him, and carry him through the bad times. And you have those people, you have so many that are here for you. Lean on us, baby. You'll find someone one day that will understand. It might take a while, maybe even til college, but you will find someone."

Will leaned against his mom's shoulder and kept his mouth shut. He didn't say, "*What if I lose them?*" Though, he thought it. "*What if I push them away?*"

6. Chapter 5

Mike stopped at Hopper's trailer. He hated that El lived there. There was a small part of him that still envisioned her living in the basement. Totally not feasible, especially because she was his girlfriend. But the image and the feeling were still there.

He walked up and knocked the rhythm El had taught him, otherwise Hopper would open the door with a gun in his hand. The door was yanked open and Hopper stood there with a towel draped over his shoulders, beads of sweat around his head and his workout shirt soaked. He obviously had yet to ask out Mrs. Byers.

"Can I come in?"

"It's kind of late to be doing homework, isn't it?"

"I need to talk to her."

"Fine, but you're out by eight." He stepped out of the way and let Mike through. Eleven was already standing in the kitchen, waiting.

"Hey, El."

"Hi, Mike." He smiled involuntarily. His name always sounded better when she said it.

Hopper pointed at El with the towel, "The door stays open."

She glared and he raised his eyebrows. She took Mike's hand and lead the way to her room. She closed the door halfway.

"Jannne-" Hopper called.

"Still open," she retorted.

There was a moment of quiet and then a grunt. He had gone back to lifting. Hopper and Eleven knew by now to pick their battles.

She turned to Mike. She brushed her thumb across his cheek, he closed his eyes and leaned into her hand, kissing it. She pulled him

close and their lips embraced.

"*Is this how Will felt?*" He pulled away, feeling guilt well up inside him. He leaned on El's shoulder.

"Mike? What's wrong?"

"Will, he..." He stopped himself. "Eleven, you have to promise me something. What I'm about to tell you can't be said. Not to anyone. Not even Max." Eleven lifted her eyebrows. Although Max and Eleven had gotten off to a rough start, they had become quite close. They'd had sleepovers and everything. She was a big part of helping Eleven understand normal girl things, navigating what social cues to adhere to and which ones she could throw to the wind.

"Friends don't lie."

"But this is not my secret, it's Will's. You have to understand, we cannot say anything. It's Will's to tell."

She looked confused. "Then, why tell me?"

"Because I can't keep secrets from you. I don't want to."

She nodded and held his hand. They sat down on the floor.

Mike drew a shaky breath. "Will... Will kissed me."

Her eyes got big. "Why would he do that? Kissing is for lovers!"

Mike choked. Sometimes the words she used caught him off guard. He could see her trying to work it out.

"You said friends don't kiss. People in love kiss. Moms kiss. Was this like a mom's kiss?"

"No. It was like a dating kiss."

The hurt in her eyes was evident. "Why? Why would he do that? I thought Will was our friend."

Mike was surprised by her reaction. It didn't seem strange to her that

a boy kissed another boy. She saw it the same way she would have if Max kissed him, like a betrayal.

"He is. He is just confused."

"He is confused about kissing?"

"No, he's... he's gay. Boys aren't supposed to kiss other boys."

"But Will did. He kissed you."

"Yeah. He... Just, let me start from the beginning..."

Eleven listened, holding in her questions and listened. This was one of those things that Max had explained to her.

"Eleven, sometimes there are stupid rules that everyone follows because that's the way things are supposed to be. Some stuff, like 'girls should wear makeup and dresses' are absolute bullshit. While others, like 'you don't go to school in a bathing suit,' are valid and make sense. Somewhere along the line, people decided what was okay and what wasn't. And sometimes the rules change."

"-He slammed the door and yelled for me to go away. I know he knows it was a mistake. He knows I'm in love with you. He's got to know that I don't feel that way about him. But I don't think he meant to; he was just upset and I kept pushing him."

"Mike."

"Just don't be mad at him, El. He's-"

"I'm not, Mike."

"You're not?"

She shrugged, "You're an easy person to fall in love with."

She still didn't get the social stigma. How was he going to explain this? Maybe it was better not to explain it. At least she didn't hate him. Will would have two friends, at least. But how would the guys take it?

"You understand why we can't tell anyone, right?"

She shrugged, "Just tell Dustin, Lucas, and Max what you told me."

Mike sighed and put his head in his hands. Eleven drew a sharp breath. She got frustrated when stuff like this went over her head. "What?" She exclaimed.

"If you tell Dustin or Lucas, they'll worry that Will is going to kiss them. They'll be weird around him. They might not even be friends with him anymore."

She made a face of disgust, "Why wouldn't they be friends with him because of that?"

"I don't even know if Will and I can still be friends. What if things are weird now between us? What if things never go back to normal?"

She crossed her arms and stared at the floor, lost in thought. He let the quiet fill the space. Sometimes she needed a moment to process things like this. She could answer math questions like she was breathing air, but social things and English literature challenged her. After a moment she spoke up, "Dustin loved Max. Max didn't love him. She loves Lucas. But they're all still friends."

"Well, yeah..."

"Does Dustin still love Max?"

"Not the same way. I don't think."

"He loves Stacy now."

"Well, yeah."

"Even though she doesn't say she loves him."

Mike felt really bad for Dustin suddenly. "I mean, yeah. Wait. What do you mean she doesn't say she loves him? She doesn't love him, does she?"

A small triumph. El held her shoulders back, haughty that she

understood something socially Mike didn't. El tried to watch people more to understand them. She had seen Stacy looking at Dustin, like El had seen Mike when he used to call out to her. That longing, like there was a distance. She didn't understand why though, he was only a few feet away. When she told Max, she had explained that it was another one of those stupid social rules. That Stacy wouldn't ask Dustin because she thought he wasn't cool enough to like; that he friends would make fun of her for liking him.

"Very stupid rule."

"Yup. That would be a bullshit rule."

"Mike. Dustin, Lucas, and Max are still friends. You, me, and Will, still friends."

Mike threw his arms around her. It surprised her and she fell backwards. Mike lifted himself up on his elbows and looked down at her. "You are so amazing." He kissed her forehead, nose, and her lips.

"We'll talk to Will tomorrow. We still can't tell anyone, though, El. When Will is ready, he'll talk to them."

El heard Hopper's feet coming down the hallway and tapped Mike's chest, signalling to get up. He fumbled backwards and they sat up in time for the door to open.

"8 o'clock, kids."

El walked Mike out the door. She held his face in her hands and pulled him close. He was getting taller than her now. She kissed his eye, his cheek, and his lips.

"Good night, Mike. I love you."

"I love you too." He kissed her again, then walked down the stairs.

She watched him go down the street until she couldn't see him anymore.

7. Chapter 6

Will's alarm blared and he hit snooze for the fifth time. He didn't want to open his eyes. He did not want to face today. It could only get worse.

He'd have to tell his friends why he broke up with Angelina, and that's if they even wanted to talk to him at all. What if Mike acted weird around him? What if he didn't want to be around him at all?

"I'm still here, okay?"

Will threw off the covers. He grabbed his jeans from the hamper and threw them on. He went to grab a shirt from the closet and caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His eyes were totally puffy. It was written all over his face.

"Nope, not happening." He went back to bed and under the covers. He couldn't face school. Maybe, Mike, maybe. It hurt like hell to think of him. But for some reason, Mike still wanted to be friends. That almost made it okay. But pretending to be normal again. Putting on that fake mask of "No, I'm definitely not going to fall apart at any moment," or "Sure, I can read Fahrenheit 451 and pretend everything is fine." Nope. No. And hell no.

Jonathan knocked on the door. "Come on, Will. It's time to get up."

Will put on his best sick voice. "I don't feel good..."

Jonathan opened the door. "We both know that's bull. That might have worked on mom, but she's left already, kid. You missed the boat on that one." He sat down on the bed and pulled the covers off his brother's face.

"Holy shit, Will." He was stunned to see just how bad Will looked.

Will grabbed the covers and hid his face again. "You're an ass."

"Was the fight that bad? What did he say?"

"Just stop, Jonathan! I don't want to talk about it. Please, don't make

me go to school today."

"But then school will just be waiting on Monday, and the day after and the day after that. There is no point in running from it."

"I'll go on Monday, just not today."

"Of course, sounds good. That way you can have the whole day to fixate on it."

Jonathan gently pulled the covers down again. Will looked at him, begrudgingly.

"There are absolutely days that are gonna suck. The day after Steve broke my camera, and I thought Nancy would hate me forever, do you think I felt like going to school? No. But you have to face the day for whatever it's going to give you and keep moving forward."

"Even if you're a faggot who kissed your best friend?" Will's eyes widened. That was supposed to be a thought not spoken!

"What did you say?"

Will shoved his brother off the bed. "Get out!"

Jonathan stood up. "No, Will. We're going to talk about this!"

Will shoved Jonathan towards the door. "GET OUT!"

He was getting closer to his brother in height but he was still scrawny in comparison. Jonathan planted his feet and held his brother's hands before they could shove him again.

Will struggled, "Get off of me!" He tried to shake his arms free.

Jonathan pulled him in close and held his little brother, tight. Will's arms went limp and he wailed loudly into his brother's chest. The sounds he had been repressing since yesterday were released. Jonathan pressed his cheek to Will's head.

"Dad knew I was a fag. He knew it. Oh, God. He knew. That's why he didn't stay. He didn't want to raise a faggot." All the accusations he

had been pointing at himself for so long bubbled to the surface.

"Hey," Jonathan pulled his brother away to look him in the eyes. "Listen to me. Fuck him! He left because he was a piece of shit. Don't you ever put that on yourself. I love you. Mom loves you. No matter what."

Will threw himself into his brother's arms again. The kid who had survived monsters beyond imagining was going to have to face a whole new kind of demon, hatred. He would be targeted, scorned, and hurt again and again and again. Jonathan held his little brother, feeling helpless.

"Okay, kid. You win. We're playing hooky today."

8. Chapter 7

Mike, Eleven, Lucas, Max, and Dustin waited for Will at the bike rack.

"Where's Will? Jonathan's supposed to bring him to school today, right?" Lucas asked.

Dustin chimed in, "Maybe he's feeling like crap for breaking up with Angelina. How does someone just break up with a cute girl like that? Does anyone know what happened?"

Mike looked at Eleven. She didn't look at him, she kept her lips pursed tight.

"Oh, come on, Dustin. Don't act like you couldn't see it," Max said.

"What?" Dustin replied.

"He was awkward, like, the whole relationship."

"That's what's supposed to happen," Lucas said, "You're supposed to be awkward, but in like a cute way."

"Well, it was awkward like in an uncomfortable way."

Mike spoke up, "Well, it's not like he could talk to her about all the stuff that's happened to him. I mean that's a huge secret to keep and a big part of his life. He's still dealing with the fallout."

Dustin and Lucas nodded, "Yeah..."

Max said, "But you guys told me."

Mike corrected, "Lucas told you and he wasn't supposed to."

Lucas was about to say something but Dustin interrupted. "And you didn't believe him til you saw the Demodogs yourself."

She glared.

Lucas changed the topic. "Even if Will didn't feel like facing Angelina,

Jonathan would still be at school."

They looked around the parking lot for the senior's car. Then the warning bell for school rang.

"Shit!" Dustin said. They all ran inside.

Mike's stomach churned as he ran.

Jonathan shut the car door. Will held several of their mixed tapes in his lap.

"You can throw those in the glove compartment."

Will opened it up and saw a pack of condoms next to several tape decks. "Is that really the place for them?"

"Yeah, its fine to put them there." He turned, "Oh." He reached over and grabbed them. Stuffing the box in his pocket.

"You don't have to hide them. I'm just saying. Isn't risky to put them in the car? The heat will weaken the latex."

Jonathan side eyed his brother. "Where did you hear that?"

"We did an experiment with latex gloves last year."

"Huh. Okay."

"So, where are we going?"

He popped a new tape in and started the car.

Jonathan smiled, "You'll see."

The bell rang for the end of first period and Mike bolted out the classroom door. He ran over to the pay phone by the lockers and fumbled two dimes in.

His fingers ran across the numbers. The line rang, "Come on. Come on."

It kept ringing until there was a familiar click, "Hi, you've reached

The Byers, we can't come to the phone right now, but leave a message and we'll get back to you as quick as possible.... Which button do I press? Oh, thi-" It beeped and Mike spoke.

"Hi, Will. It's Mike. I just wanted to make sure you're okay. Jonathan? Are you guys okay? Please, let me know if everything's alright. I'll see you after school. I'm coming over. Okay?" He hung up and leaned his head again the phone.

"Mike?"

He jumped and turned around to see Eleven. She was too good at being quiet.

"What if he-"

"AV Room."

"El, this is not like middle school. They have classes in the AV Room here."

"It'll be empty."

"No. Whatever you're thinking, no." The bell rang. He walked in and Eleven followed. Another bell rang, it was the fire alarm. He turned to see El had pulled the lever.

"AV Room's open now."

She grabbed his hand and pulled him.

They ran over to the stairwell and hid under the staircase as hundreds of feet padded down. When after a few moments, it was quiet.

She tugged his arm, "Now."

They lept up the stairs, two at a time. They turned the corner and threw the door open to the Audio Visual room. El went to the radio, turned it on so that it was static, and cranked the volume up to over power the fire alarm. She closed her eyes and listened for Will.

It was dark but she heard music faintly. She turned to see Jonathan and Will sitting in the car. She climbed in the back seat and listened.

"H-how did Mike react?"

"I don't want..." Will sighed, "He was disgusted. The way he looked. He-" Will put his head in his hands, breathed, then ran his fingers through his hair and held his head up again. "But he said he'd still be here. He still wants to be friends. At least, that's what he said."

"He meant it. I was talking to him last night. He didn't tell me what happened, but he just... he had that stubborn thing about him that he does. He was like, 'we'll be fine.' 'I don't take him for granted.'"

Mike listened on the radio to the conversation El had channeled into. He felt relieved that Will was safe. Mike touched her shoulder and she came to. He grabbed a tissue out of his pocket and handed it to El. She wiped her nose.

"Are you okay to walk? Did you have to channel far?"

El replied, "I'm okay. Wasn't far."

She stood up and Mike put his arm around her. "We should get out of here before everyone comes back."

9. Chapter 8

After about an hour of driving, they began to see more signs for Ohio.

"Jonathan, where are we going?"

His older brother smiled, "Cincinnati. I toured some colleges there with mom."

"Are you serious?!" Will lit up.

"Yeah. They have the one of the oldest art museums in the United States. Figured you could study the masters for a few hours while I take some pictures."

Will couldn't keep the smile off his face. "Thanks, Jonathan."

He glanced over. "No problem, kid. Do you mind grabbing the map out of the glove compartment? We've got some turns coming up."

"Sure."

They walked up to the museum. Will ran up the steps and Jonathan followed behind. His younger brother was growing up, but at this moment, he still seemed like the little kid pulling on his brother's arm. Suddenly, the idea of leaving for NYU seemed like he'd be abandoning his brother. Guilt washed over him.

"Jonathan, you getting to be an old man or something? Come on!"

Jonathan shoved the feeling aside and ran to catch up with his brother. They walked inside to see towering columns and marble as far as the eye could see. Suddenly, Will looked worried.

"Jonathan," he whispered, "This place... it's too expensive. We can't-"

"Hey, don't you worry about the cost. Call it an early Christmas present."

Jonathan walked passed the receptionist desks. Will did a double take. "Isn't that where we get the tickets?"

Jonathan chuckled. "It's free to get in. We gotta pay to get into special exhibitions. We can go to those, if you want. Before we go in though, let's stop in here for a second." He walked toward the gift shop and grabbed a sketchbook and set of pencils.

Will ran to catch up, stunned, "Jon-"

"Merry Christmas." He handed Will the sketchbook and pencils, "Time for your art lessons with Van Gogh."

Will hugged him tight, overwhelmed. "Thank you."

For the next few hours they explored the museum, Will drawing and Jonathan taking pictures. Then, they stopped in the food court.

"After this, we gotta head out so we can beat Mom home." He dipped his fries in some kind of cheese flavored goo.

"Are you going to tell her?"

"About today? Not for a while if I can help it."

Will looked at his food, "About me."

Jonathan put his fries down. "No. That's yours to tell. Do you want me to tell her?"

Will drew a shaky breath, "I don't know."

"You know she wouldn't care."

"It'd be another thing for her to worry about me. I hate it. I hate that she thinks I'm so fragile. But am I? Am I fragile?"

"No. You gotta know that."

"I don't know."

"You're a survivor, Will. You wouldn't be one if you were fragile. You've dealt with more shit in your life than most people twice your age. If a zombie apocalypse ever happens, you'll be there with your rifle and chainsaw to tear them up."

"But it isn't zombies, it's high school. It's this normal stuff."

"Throw yourself into your art, kid. I had to do that a lot and it got me through. You keep your nose in that sketchbook. Keep looking to the future and it'll be here before you know it. Finish your hamburger, we gotta head out."

Will scarfed down the last of it and they walked out.

10. Chapter 9:Final

Mike and Eleven hid under the staircase until the crowd of people returned. They hid themselves among the masses and went their separate ways back to class.

He got into class with the rest. Dustin turned to look at Mike. "Dude, where were you?"

"Shhh." I was calling Will's house when the alarm rang."

"Did you talk to him? What's up?"

"He said he was fine. But that was all I got before the bell rang."

"Well, you're lucky Mr. Duffield is half way to senile or you would have been toast."

Mr. Duffield called to everyone, "Settle down, now, settle down. That was a fun little jaunt but it's back to isosceles. Get out your textbooks."

By the end of the day, nearly everyone had figured out it wasn't a normal drill and was wondering who had pulled the fire alarm. Thankfully, a junior had used the opportunity to skip school and the blame/ credit/ detention was given to him.

One of Angelina's friends had come up to the group and told them that Will was a coward and piece of shit.

Dustin replied, "Yeah, but he's our piece of shit. Tell Angelina, that we thought she was awesome and good luck in the auditions."

Her friend seemed deflated, like she had been ready for an argument. She turned around and walked back to her locker.

Lucas turned to the group, "So, should we head over to Will's house? Check up on him? Fill him in on the massive drama he missed?"

Mike looked unsteady. He had planned on seeing him but not the whole gang. How could he tell them without revealing everything?

Dustin nodded. "Sounds good to me."

Eleven spoke up, "Don't."

Max turned confused, "What?"

Lucas asked, "Why not?"

Mike looked wide eyed at Eleven. "*No. No. She promised!*"

Eleven said, "Mike and Will fought yesterday. They have to talk it out first."

"What did you guys fight over?" Lucas asked turned to Mike.

He still couldn't find the words. "It was private," he choked out.

Eleven spoke for him again. "Max said it already. He wasn't in love with Angelina. He wants..." She turned to Dustin and made a lightning gesture with her hands.

"Electricity?" He said.

She nodded.

Dustin shrugged sympathetically, "I can talk to him."

Eleven said, "Yes. But Mike has to talk first. Try to mend it."

They all agreed and Mike just stood in awe of his girlfriend.

Eleven rode on the back of Mike's bike. He had tried to tell her that he had to go alone, but he had been silenced with a look. Mike had also learned to pick his battles.

They pulled up to the house. Joyce was working late and Jonathan's car still wasn't there. Mike leaned his bike against the house and sat down on the porch steps. Eleven leaned her head on him and held his hand. Mike tried to search his mind for what to say to Will. They sat in the silence together.

By the last leg of the journey, they started to hit traffic. Jonathan tapped nervously on the steering wheel. Will understood that they

would be in some unbelievable amount of deep shit if their mom came home and didn't see them there. Cutting school, driving 2 hours into a city in another state, and without a call or note. Jonathan realized now, a note could have really saved their asses. But he just kept his eye on the clock and praying they'd get home in time.

"She doesn't get off until 5 tonight, right?"

"Yeah."

"We still got an hour and a half..."

"Yup. Just keep your fingers crossed, buddy."

"Jonathan. I know I've said this a hundred times today, but seriously, thank you."

"I wouldn't trade this day. Even if she grounds me til graduation."

"I could... come out to her... maybe she wouldn't be so hard on you?"

"If you want to tell her, you can but-"

Will smirked, "Hey, if it saves your ass, sure." He took a deep breath, "You're sure she won't kick me out?"

Jonathan gave Will the death glare, "You are not serious are you? Are we talking about the woman who strung Christmas lights up around the entire house? Who literally crawled into hell to bring you back? You think the same woman would kick you out of the house for being gay?"

"God, when you say it like that."

Jonathan tussled his hair. Traffic began moving again and Jonathan clapped, and eased off the brake.

They turned down their road.

"4:29. We live another day." Jonathan joked.

Will smiled but when they pulled up the driveway, he saw Mike and

Eleven sitting on the porch, waiting. His face fell.

"No." Will thought. He stared wide eyed as Jonathan put the car in park.

"Okay. Listen, Will. I am here for you no matter what happens." He gripped his brother's hand. "It'll be okay. He just wants to talk. Do you want me to stay out here with you?"

Will shook his head and slowly unbuckled his seatbelt. He took a deep breath and opened the door. Mike and Eleven stood up. Mike took a step forward but stopped himself. He didn't want Will to feel cornered or harassed. So he crossed his arms and waited for Will to come over to him.

"Hey, Will."

He walked over to Mike. "Mike, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I never should have done that."

"It's okay, Will. You were upset and wanted to be alone. I shouldn't have kept pushing."

"Pushing? Yeah. Calling me brave and shit. That- that was really pushy."

They were quiet.

Mike took a deep breath. "Will, you're still my best friend. I don't want to lose you. You've always been like the brother I never had. I don't know how I can make things okay again, but I'll try."

Will bit his lips, turning his face away. He didn't want to start crying again.

"Talk to me, Will. Stop keeping it in. I want to know."

His voice trembled, "I didn't really realize what it was until around the Snow Ball. I didn't want to dance with Angelina. I didn't want to dance with anyone. I just wanted to hang out with you. I remember wondering if that was weird." The floodgates had opened and suddenly words were pouring out of him. It felt terrifying but

relieving. "Do you remember when we went on that double date? We were passing around the popcorn and our hands touched. But it felt different. I had been holding Angelina's hand for half the movie, but the one second of contact and I felt static. I knew it then. But I looked over at you and Eleven, and I saw how happy you were together." Will looked over at Eleven, "I never want to get between that. I just wish... " He sobbed, "I wish I could feel that kind of happiness but I don't know if I ever will." He collapsed onto the ground, covering his face.

He felt Mike's hand on his shoulder. There was hesitation there. *"I'm making things worse, I should have said any of this."*

Mike gently squeezed his shoulder, "Thank you for telling me. I know I said this earlier but it's still true: You are going to find someone that will love you. You deserve happiness. I know it's going to be tough. But I'm here."

Will felt a pair of arms wrap around him. "We're here for you, Will." Eleven said.

He leaned his head on her shoulder. Mike wrapped his arms around them both.

Will lifted his head, "Who else knows."

Mike replied, "Just Eleven. She's the only one that's going to know until you're ready to tell the others."

Will shook his head, "They'll hate me."

Mike replied, "We've been friends for over half our lives, way too long for them to care about that."

Will was about to retort but Eleven cut him off, "Boys can't like boys is a bullshit rule. Max hates bullshit rules. So do Lucas and Dustin."

"I don't think I'm ready, yet."

"You don't have to be," said Mike. "But we'll be here for you."

Will put an arm around Eleven and Mike. They were still his rock.